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ABSTRACT

Fifty percent of 60 farm managers responded to a survey regarding training practices and their attitudes toward training on the farm. The 30 respondents were primarily managers of larger farms with freestall barns and milking parlors, managers of dairies with above average production and profitability, and dairy farm owner-operators. Participants managed farms with 49 to 1,200 cows and hired both full- and part-time employees. Survey results suggested many dairy farm employees lacked basic work skills; the higher the skill level required for a job, the more difficult it was to find skilled employees to do the job; and hiring laborers was much easier than hiring independent employees or working managers. The majority of employers indicated they would prefer to hire untrained individuals and train them themselves. The majority of managers indicated that the person most responsible for training on the farm felt very confident about his/her ability as a trainer but that the training function on the farm would be improved if the manager or key employee became a better trainer. Managers responded positively about five alternative training techniques. Most managers indicated they would be willing to pay a modest amount for training services. Management time was the greatest barrier to effective on-the-job training. The two most important barriers to off-site training were lack of available courses in the community and concern that workers would leave. (YLB)

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EMPLOYEE TRAINING PRACTICES ON LARGE NEW YORK DAIRY FARM BUSINESSES

I. Introduction

In recent years, concerns regarding employee training have been increasing among managers of large dairy farms. As dairy farm businesses grow in size and utilize more complex and costly technology, the need for proper employee training increases. Employee performance, productivity, and motivation can be significantly impacted by proper training. Farm managers today report that skilled employees are more difficult to recruit than in the past. There also appears to be an increase in the number of employees hired on dairy farms with no previous dairy farm experience. These factors have prompted discussion in the dairy industry regarding the importance of training in the dairy farm business and how training should be conducted.

II. Objective

The objective of this publication is to report on dairy farm managers' opionions regarding training practices and their attitudes toward training on the farm.

III. Methodology

The population for the survey was individuals who had previously expressed an interest in employee training. Approximately one-third of those surveyed had previously responded to a Department of Agriculture and Markets survey indicating that they felt training was very important. Another third of those surveyed attended a workshop on employee training and conflict management in Watertown, New York in November 1990. The final third of the respondents attended a workshop on training at the Large Dairy Herd Management Conference in Syracuse, New York in April 1991.

The survey was mailed or given to approximately 60 farm managers between the months of November 1990 and April 1991. Thirty farm managers responded to the survey. The respondents are primarily managers of larger farms with freestall barns and milking parlors. Respondents are considered to be managers of dairies with above average production and profitability. Most of the respondents are dairy farm owner-operators; a few are herd managers.

IV. Demographic Information

The 30 participants in this survey managed farms with 49 to 1,200 cows. The average herd size was 249.

Participants hired both full and part-time employees. Part-time employees hired ranged from 1-7 with an average of two per farm. There was an average of four full-time employees on the 30 farms with a range of 1-14 per farm.

V. Survey Responses

Participants were asked questions about training issues on their farm. The questions and responses are summarized below.

1) What is the primary problem or issue on your farm that you feel training could address? (Survey participants were asked to check all that apply.)

		Number Responding	Percent Responding
a.	Employee lacks basic skills	16	53
b.	Poor job performance	11	33
c.	Lack of motivation	16	53
d.	Lack of formal education	6	20
e.	Other	3	10

2) a. Who does most of the training on your farm?

	Number Responding	Percent Responding
Self	27	90
Other	3	10

b. The person most responsible for training on my farm feels very confident about his/her ability as a trainer.

	Number Responding	Percent Responding
Strongly agree	3	10
Agree	19	63
Disagree	8	27
Strongly disagree	0	0

3) How difficult is it for you to hire the following classification of employees with the skills you want on your farm?

a. **Working Manager** - Has management responsibilities including authority to make decisions and/or the supervision of employees.

	Number Responding	Percent Responding
Not difficult	7	23
Very difficult	16	53
No response	7	23

b. **Independent Employee** - Understands work requirements, works under limited supervision, possesses strong skills related to the job, and makes some decisions.

	Number Responding	Percent Responding
Not difficult	14	47
Very difficult	15	50
No response	1	3

c. **Laborer** - Works under close supervision, makes few if any decisions, possesses basic skills rather than advanced skills.

	Number Responding	Percent Responding
Not difficult	24	80
Very difficult	6	20

4) I would prefer to hire an untrained individual and train them myself.

	Number Responding	Percent Responding
Strongly agree	1	3
Agree	18	60
Disagree	9	30
Strongly agree	2	7

5) Which of the following do you feel would most improve training on your farm?

		Number Responding	Percent Responding
a.	For you or someone on your farm to become a better trainer	8	27
b.	To send employee to appropriate training classes if they were available	4	13
c.	Both of the above	17	58

6) Considering your on-the-job training needs, which of the following would be helpful to you in improving the training on your farm?

a. Workshop on how to become a better trainer.

	Not Helpful						Very Helpful				NO RESPONSE
RATING	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Number responding	0	0	1	1	4	0	5	6	7	3	3
Percent responding	0	0	3	3	13	0	17	20	23	10	10

b. Correspondence courses for managers and workers.

	Not Helpful						Very Helpful				NO RESPONSE
RATING	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Number responding	1	4	2	3	4	2	1	2	3	7	
Percent responding	3	13	7	10	13	7	3	3	10	23	4

c. Video tapes to aid you in training specific tasks.

	Number Responding	Percent Responding
Yes	19	63
No response	11	37

If you checked video tapes, what topics would you like to see addressed?

Heat observation
The need for precision in jobs that require it.
Motivation and communication.
Milking, general herd health.
Working skills, loyalty, and punctuality.
Basic machinery operation and maintenance.

7) Do you feel that classroom training would be helpful for the employees in your business?

	Number Responding	Percent Responding
Yes	21	70
No	6	20
No response	3	10

If yes, what courses would you like to see offered by a local B.O.C.E.S., community college, or other adult education program?

Milking procedures and producing quality milk. Equipment maintenance.
Milking procedures. Animal health.
I think that most areas on a dairy farm are of extreme importance - examples - milking, feeding, safety, cow health, bunker/silo management. Employees need to be educated through an outside source in order to hopefully impact them on how important each of their functions are to the operation. The more knowledge they possess on why things are done certain ways should help their overall performance and concern on how well a job is done.
Basic farm management principles.

Herdsman schools. Welding. Personal finance. Various computer software available.
A basic teaching of why cows get mastitis or why it is important to prepare cow for milking.
Calf raising. Milking.
Basic animal care importance of the proper care.
General herd health. Milking, heat detection. Equipment.
Tractor operation. Cow milking. Job application skills.
There are two parts to our operation - 1) dairy, 2) machinery operator - so we need programs in both areas.
General discipline. Training in the use of tractors in a safe manner.
Cow care and handling. Proper milking technique: a) beginner, b) advanced.
I need technical skilled people. Super Cow Milking 101. Basic machinery care during operation. Machinery maintenance. Basic herd management.

8) If there was an on-the-job certification program for farm employees with a written curriculum to upgrade the skills of farm employees, and an opportunity for employer involvement, would you be interested in providing such a program for your employees?

	Number Responding	Percent Responding
Yes	22	73
No	5	17
No response	3	10

9) Are you willing to pay for off-farm employee training?

	Number Responding	Percent Responding
Yes	22	73
No	8	27

10) Assume that there is a six week, two hour course of interest - how much would you pay to send an employee to it?

		Number Responding	Percent Responding
a.	Not interested	6	20
b.	Up to $30	1	3
c.	Up to $50	6	20
d.	Up to $100	16	54
e.	Over $100	1	3

11) How much would you pay to buy a video to teach milking practices?

		Number Responding	Percent Responding
a.	Would not be interested	5	17
b.	Up to $30	20	66
c.	Up to $50	5	17
d.	Up to $100	0	0
e.	More than $100	0	0

12) There are a number of possible barriers or obstacles in some farm businesses which need to be overcome to make training feasible.

For each of the "barriers to training" listed below, please indicate to what extent each is an important issue on your farm.

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

a. Lack of qualified personnel to conduct training.

	Number Responding	Percent Responding
Important	10	33
Unimportant	13	43
No opinion	6	20

b. Lack of time to conduct training.

	Number Responding	Percent Responding
Important	18	60
Unimportant	8	27
No opinion	1	3

c. Other barriers to On-The-Job training: please describe.

Worker enthusiasm is lacking.
Cost.
May not be top priority, set up training programs, set time aside, etc.
Need worksheet.
Taking the time to do it. Not knowing how to do it. Not considering it a priority item.
Dumb and no motivation.

OFF-SITE TRAINING

		Percent of Managers Who Thought Training was: Important	Unimportant	No Opinion
On-The-Job-Training				
a.	Lack of qualified personnel to conduct training	33%	43%	20%
b.	Lack of time to conduct training	60%	27%	3%
Off-Site Training				
a.	Training is too expensive	27%	50%	20%
b.	It is difficult to interest workers in off-site training	33%	23%	27%
c.	Concern that "workers will leave after I get them trained"	47%	43%	10%
d.	Can't afford to allow worker time off for training	23%	60%	10%
e.	Appropriate courses are not available in the community	70%	3%	17%

f. Other barriers to Off-Site Training: please describe

Distance to training site.
Time of year.
Main obstacle is the quality and pertinence of programs available.
I think it would be hard to train a milker off-site. I don't know how it would work.
Cooperative Extension has had herdsman seminar - was repetitious from year to year. It was fine for new person - but the herdsman didn't receive much new information if he went 2-3 years in a row.
Workers should be on site for training.

Please make any comments regarding training that seem to be important on your farm.

Videos with some guidance can be very helpful.
As manager of the business, I find it (impossible) difficult to take time to train all employees.
Milking processors. Calf raising. Herd health. Safety.
Each farm has its own way of doing everything.
Bottom line is what it is all about. If the program clearly helps our bottom line, it will be well attended and successful. Poor quality instruction is doomed to failure.

I feel that a combination of home study courses, videos, and on the job training would work best for me. Because of logistics and cost it is difficult to present a wide range of topics at frequent intervals in an off site classroom situation. Occasional (annual) series such as PRO-DAIRY courses are useful in expanding base knowledge obtained by other means. Materials need to be available in Spanish as well as English.

Training is very important but I think training goes on for as long as a person works for you. If you change something you have to still be training to make the change. Training is learning and I don't think that people stop learning after their training, because I am still learning and in a way being trained to manage.

We would like to have the key individuals/managers on our farm receive training techniques on how to manage/train other employees. They play an important part in that along with us (my husband and I). Agriculture is such a diverse field - there are many areas and topics that could be very interesting for study.

People that are of a good technical level tend to take classroom training lightly.

Past participation in training programs: Have you or your employees ever participated in any type of formal training programs off the farm?

	Number Responding	Percent Responding
Yes	17	57
No	9	30
No response	4	13

If yes, please indicate training program(s) and topics by class of worker.

Working Manager:

PRO-DAIRY

PRO-DAIRY and Extension.

PRO-DAIRY

PRO-DAIRY. Large herd management. Labor management courses.

PRO-DAIRY

Employee relations - labor management. Management. Large herd conference. Many other conferences - every chance we get.

PRO-DAIRY. PCA and Extension seminars.

I am milking manager. I attended a farm management program that covered training.

PRO-DAIRY

Farm management course at local college by Extension.

Herdsman seminar - Cooperative Extension.

Independent Employee:

Extension

Developing your workforce for high performance.

Parlor training for maintenance. Equipment training maintenance.

Reproductive seminars. Milking machine seminar on ATO.
One went to large herd conference but he is sometimes used as a manager. Tech schools if they were available - but they are not.
PRO-DAIRY
Herdsman school basic balancing rations by Extension A.I. school.

Laborer:

Used to go to herdsman's schools - no longer available. Very little time spent off farm with these people.

Considering all the work skills required in your business, what skills would training have the greatest benefit on in your business? Please list:

		Number Responding	Percent Responding
a.	Milking	27	90
b.	Feeding	16	53
c.	Heat detection	23	77
d.	Equipment operation	18	60
e.	Equipment repair	12	40
f.	Other		

VI. Conclusions and Observations

The results of this survey offer some clues regarding important training issues facing managers of large dairy farms now and in the future. The following are observations based on responses to the survey questions.

1. **Dairy farming is complex and many employees need advanced training.** The survey suggests that many dairy farm employees lack basic work skills. It also suggests that the higher the skill level required for a job, the more difficult it is to find skilled employees to do the job. Managers indicated it was much easier to hire laborers than it was to hire independent employees or working managers.

The majority of employers surveyed indicated that they would prefer to hire an untrained individual and train them themselves. This places increased pressure on managers to properly train and develop employees.

2. **Managers often know how to do the job but are not always effective trainers.** The majority of the managers surveyed indicated that the person most responsible for training on the farm felt very confident about his or her ability as a trainer. However, in another question, a majority of the managers surveyed indicated that the training function on the farm would be improved if the manager or a key employee became a better trainer. It seems likely that most dairy farm managers are very confident about their technical knowledge and skill but less confident about their ability to train effectively.

3. **Managers are willing to explore alternative training techniques.** The survey asked managers to indicate how valuable they feel the five training techniques would be to them. The training techniques included: 1) Workshops on how to become a better trainer, 2) Correspondence courses for workers and managers, 3) video tapes, 4) classroom training for employees, and 5) on-the-job certification programs. Managers responded positively about each of these alternatives and each may present future opportunities for the dairy industry.

4. **Most managers would be willing to pay a modest amount for employee training**. At the present time, most training on dairy farms is informal on-the-job mentoring which is part of the manager's overall responsibility. Most managers are not yet accustomed to paying extra for training aids and training services. Most of the managers surveyed indicated that they would be willing to pay a modest amount for training services. Examples include: when managers were asked how much they would pay to

send an employee to a six week, two hour course; 20 percent indicated that they would be willing to spend up to $50 and 54 percent said they were willing to spend up to $100. When asked how much they would pay for a video to teach milking practices to employees, 66 percent indicated that they would be willing to spend up to $30 and 17 percent indicated that they would be willing to spend up to $50. While these responses indicate an awareness that there are costs associated with training, most dairy farm managers may not appreciate what other firms pay for training.

5. **Management time is the greatest barrier to effective on-the-job training.** Sixty percent of the managers responding to the survey indicated that lack of time to conduct training was an important barrier to training. Only 33 percent of the managers surveyed indicated that lack of qualified personnel to conduct training was an important barrier to on-the-job training. It would appear that the managers in this survey recognize that training could be important but have not yet translated that recognition into a priority for their management time. As dairy farm businesses become larger, managers should spend more time in management functions and delegate additional labor tasks. The indication that management functions like training are important but time is not available is a symptom indicating that the necessary priority on management time is lacking.

6. **Lack of available courses in the community and concern that "workers will leave after I get them trained" were seen as the two most important barriers to training.** Managers were provided with a list of five possible barriers to off-site training of dairy farm employees. Managers were asked to what extent these barriers were important. The results are summarized below.

Barrier to Off-Site Training	Percent of Managers Who Thought Barrier was Important
Appropriate courses not available in community	70%
Concern workers will leave after I get them trained	47%
It is difficult to interest worker in off-site training	33%
Training is too expensive	27%
Can't afford to allow worker time off for training	23%

7. **Milking practices and heat detection are priority training areas.** Managers were asked to identify what skills training would have the greatest benefit in their businesses. The top three choices were milking practices, heat detection, and equipment operation.

8. **The introduction of training programs for dairy farm personnel is going to be difficult.** Managers recognize its importance as evidenced by their answers; they have not, however, translated that importance to a priority for training as evidenced by the indication that time is the major barrier in training. Pilot training projects should be undertaken with the involvement of and commitment of dairy farm managers.

Summary

As farms businesses increase in size, there will be an increased need for effective employee training. This survey identifies two primary issues regarding training that the dairy industry will need to address. First, the managers surveyed indicated that time was a barrier to effective training. Training should be viewed as a legitimate part of the management function and time allocated accordingly. Second, there is a need in the dairy industry to

identify off-farm training alternatives. Video tapes, workshops, correspondence courses, and community college courses all offer alternatives which should be explored in the future. Studies on personnel management practices show that as the size of the business grows, there is an increasing need to formalize personnel management practices. As dairy farms employ more people, there will be a greater need for more formalized training practices.

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